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Demilitarization, Demobilization, and the Social and Economic Integration of Ex-combatants: Lessons from the World Bank Africa Experience

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not USAID.

Background

Africa was among the first battlefronts and final casualties of the cold war. Many devastating conflicts have persisted for 20 years or more. Some countries (such as Ethiopia, Eritria, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, and more recently, Angola, Chad, Liberia, and Mozambique) are emerging from years of cold war politics and internal civil strife, but pernicious internal struggles continue to plague others (Sierra Leone, Somalia, DR Congo, CAR, Republic of Congo, and the Sudan, for example).

The damage inflicted on the social and human capital as well as the economic potential of these countries has been horrific. Of the estimated 80 million to 110 million land mines spread across 64 countries around the world, about 20 million are strewn across nearly half the countries of Africa. The impact of warfare on disinvestment, the destruction of physical infrastructure, and the deterioration of social and human capital through disability, death, and displacement is impossible to quantify. Armed conflict is surely one reason why at least 250 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa—nearly half the population—are living below the poverty line in the mid-1990s.

While war-ravaged countries are among the poorest in the world, their neighbors, in which hundreds of thousands of people seek refuge from the devastation of war, often feel the effects evironmentally and socially. Over the past decade the African continent hosted about half of the world's displaced people, and by 1994, 21.4 million Africans had fled their homes because of conflict. Of these, 6.2 million were living abroad, representing 38 percent of the world's refugees.

Despite these dire circumstances, the governments of the continent have devoted a substantial percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) to military expenditures (3.1 percent in 1992). Expenditures for defense have crowded out those for human development. For example, in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa defense expenditures surpass those for health and education combined.

The ideological camps that once fueled military buildups receded with the end of the cold war, making it possible for many African governments to begin to downsize their militaries and reduce defense expenditures so that human and material resources may be shifted to development activities. Demobilization and reintegration programs for military personnel constitute a vital part of demilitarization in particular, and of transitions from war to peace in general.

Indeed, increased demilitarization is a precondition for reviving civil society, reducing poverty, and sustaining development in Africa. The realization of this objective demands disarmament, demining, and demobilization of forces, as well as the reintegration of ex-combatants into productive civilian roles. Demilitarization also requires reducing the destructive flow of arms as well as conversion where appropriate.

World suppliers of arms continue to sell large quantities of military hardware to war zones, and this could be an obstacle to a rapid transition to peace. In the past, principals in the

cold war armed local factions or entire countries; internal factions now rely on the control and sale of precious natural resources (ranging from forest woods to diamonds and oil) to sustain their arms purchases. The path to peace is thus littered with mines, both underground and in the form of violent sociopolitical rivalry.

The millions of displaced people scattered within and around the borders of warring countries are a grim reminder of the human consequences of such conflicts. The relationship between poverty and conflict is clear. What a world unblemished by internal conflicts would have looked like is hard to imagine.

In his speech at the 1995 annual meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, James D. Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank, declared that a priority of the Bank is to anticipate and be organized for post-conflict economic development programs. A demobilization and reintegration program (DRP) for ex-combatants is the key to an effective transition from war to peace. The success of this first step following the signing of a peace accord signals the end to organized conflict and provides the security necessary for people affected by war to reinvest in their lives and their country.

The Fundamental Elements of a DRP

Early on, our primary entry point was within the context of public expenditure reallocation, that is, shifting scarce financial resources away from defense and to the social and productive sectors. This was an effort to address the crowding out effects of military expenditures on social and economic development. However, as Bank experience and understanding evolved, we have come to appreciate the developmental linkages between demilitarization, social and economic reintegration of war-affected populations, and the overall reconstruction process.

The essential elements of any DRP are: (1) a *demobilization phase* accenting disarmament, discharge, orientation, and relocation to a community of the ex-combatant's choice; (2) a *reinsertion phase,* marked by the provision of a transitional safety net of cash and in-kind payments spread out over a several month period, roughly equivalent to a single growing season; and (3) *social and economic reintegration* assistance in the form of access to productive assets (particularly land and capital), training and employment, and information and counseling services.

While targeting ex-combatants, particularly the most vulnerable and their families as units, is important, area-based interventions that also provide inputs to the rehabilitation of social infrastructure in recipient communities is equally important.

The basic ingredients for success are: a) political will, b) careful preparation based on rapid assessments of the opportunity structure and a profiling of the needs of ex-combatants and their families, and c) transparent institutional arrangements with a simple monitoring and feedback system to ensure flexible but accountable implementation (to both donors and the community).

Reinsertion and reintegration are not distinct phases after demobilization. Rather, they form part of a seamless web of transition from military to civilian life, without a clear beginning or end. As reinsertion and reintegration proceed, the needs of ex-combatants change and call for different support measures.

A successful DRP requires several actions: a) classifying ex-combatants according to their characteristics, needs, and desired way of earning a livelihood (mode of subsistence); b) offering a basic transitional assistance package (safety net); c) finding a way to deliver assistance simply, minimizing transaction costs while maximizing benefits to ex-combatants; d) providing counseling, information, training, employment, and social support while sensitizing communities and building on existing social capital; e) coordinating centrally yet decentralizing implementation authority to districts; and f) connecting to ongoing development efforts by retargeting and restructuring existing portfolios.

Key Lessons from Experience

There are several key lessons drawn from Bank experience that warrant close consideration by Bank staff, client governments, donors in the design and implementation of DRPs. These lessons are summarized below.

Political Dimensions

When a country is moving from war to peace, demobilization and reintegration issues should be addressed at the earliest stages of the peace negotiation process. Strong political will and leadership, expressed in terms of commitment, realism, and pragmatism, are crucial factors for successful program implementation. National reconciliation should be actively promoted through transparent policies and conflict resolution efforts at the community level. These can reduce suspicion and help rebuild trust.

The question of land ownership and distribution needs to be treated carefully and openly. Both traditional and legal rights to the land, as well as historically rooted inequalities, have to be taken into account.

Targeting

Ex-combatants constitute a specially vulnerable group in need of priority targeted assistance. Socioeconomic data should be collected to reveal their characteristics, needs, and aspirations so that appropriate program interventions can be designed.

Careful analysis of the opportunity structure for ex-combatants (in particular, the demand for labor and the availability of land, credit, information, and provision for skill development) is a prerequisite not only for program design but also for targeted counseling and adequate placement.

An authentic, nontransferable, and noncorruptible identification system is of paramount importance for avoiding targeting errors.

The particular challenges confronting veterans' depends (the family), as well as female soldiers, child soldiers, and disabled ex-combatants, warrant the development of specially targeted interventions.

Demobilization

Ex-combatants should be released or discharged from military quarters as soon as possible so that they do not become a serious threat to security. Prior to discharge, they should receive information about civilian life—rights and duties, opportunities and constraints. If feasible, post-discharge orientation, with a focus on social support and economic opportunities, should be provided in the communities where ex-combatants settle.

Especially in transition from war to peace, neutral international monitors and technical assistance can facilitate the design and implementation of demobilization programs.

Reinsertion

Entitlement packages, which provide a safety net during the transition from war to peace, should reflect the needs of ex-combatants and their families in different socioeconomic environments. Such packages help ex-combatants and their families bridge the difficult period between demobilization and reintegration.

Monetizing the entitlement packages has several advantages over in-kind provision: transaction cost can be reduced, leakage can be better controlled, and beneficiaries can make flexible use of the entitlement.

Using local banks for transferring cash in installments allows ex-combatants to access financial assistance throughout the reinsertion phase. Staggered payments made to beneficiaries through local banks also help spread benefits and ex-combatants throughout the country. The capacity of the banking system or alternate payment systems, especially in rural areas, must therefore be evaluated before transfers begin.

Reintegration

Ex-combatants should be assigned to target groups and subgroups on the basis of their mode of subsistence and thus on their differing needs and aspirations. This allows for the development of a differentiated, relevant, and cost-effective approach.

Ex-combatants should receive no more support than is necessary to help them attain the

standard of living of the communities into which they are reintegrated.

Reintegration in urban areas is more complex than in rural areas and requires a more diversified approach. All support measures should be based on a careful matching of opportunities and actual needs. Support measures should, to the extent possible, be demand-driven.

Social Dimensions

It is the interplay of a community's physical and social capital and the ex-combatant's financial and human capital that ultimately determines the ease and success of reintegration.

Efforts to strengthen social capital—for example, by using existing community organizations and channels of communication—enable communities to take development into their own hands and facilitate reintegration of ex-combatants.

Informal networks of ex-combatants—discussion groups, veterans' associations, and joint economic ventures—are key elements for successful economic and social reintegration. Such associations can be extremely helpful when social capital has been depleted.

A community is a critical adjunct to assistance for ex-combatants. Community sensitization and political awareness are paramount in this effort.

Care should be taken that ex-combatants are not stigmatized as unfit for military service or as conveyors of disease, violence, and misbehavior.

Institutional Concerns

To put scarce resources to optimal use, program components should be ranked by simplicity of implementation, with the simplest components first on the list.

Central coordination of DRPs by one civilian agency with overall responsibility, balanced by decentralization of implementation authority to district and communities through existing organizational structures, makes for a powerful institutional arrangement.

Administrative costs need to be held down. The higher the transaction (administrative) costs, the smaller the resources available to ex-combatants.

The effectiveness of program interventions in relation to ongoing development initiatives is maximized by careful coordination within government and among other project promoters.

Once the major program objectives have been fulfilled, remaining activities should be integrated into the government's mainstream development efforts.

Elected representatives of ex-combatants, as well as field-based staff, can perform crucial roles in facilitating reintegration.

Local communities should be involved directly in decision making, especially on important local matters, so that scarce public resources are allocated in a transparent and socially accountable manner.

Management Aspects

Staff training to improve skills and knowledge should begin before demobilization and should emphasize practical problem solving.

The most important contribution of a monitoring and evaluation system is to consistently improve ongoing operations—by keeping abreast of major trends in the program and by regularly reporting to and advising management.

Use of an external auditor improves management of funds. The external auditor, in addition to ensuring control of program resources and transparency, gives confidence to the donors and to the beneficiaries.

External Assistance

Timely availability of resources facilitates smooth operations. Donor budget cycles and disbursement and auditing procedures have to be closely meshed with implementation schedules for DRPs.

Capacity building and close coordination among the government, NGOs, community-based groups, and donors are central elements of cooperation. Coordination of donor support by a lead donor has proved very effective.

Economic Impact

The peace dividend needs to be understood in social and economic terms, as well as financial terms. The reinvestment of some savings from military downsizing into the development of a disciplined, high-quality defense force can itself produce a peace dividend by increasing security, building confidence, and reducing public fear.

It is useful to link a country's overall macroeconomic reform program, especially as it concerns the public expenditure mix, to the planned reintegration program.

Jump-starting the economy by rehabilitating critical infrastructure also can be linked to reintegration programs that involve training and employment schemes for both reconstructuring material assets and building human and social capital.

Continental demilitarization is a precondition for reviving civil society, reducing poverty, and sustaining development in Africa. The realization of this objective hinges on disarmament, the demobilization of forces, and the reduction of the flow of arms into the continent, on the one hand, and on the reintegration of ex-combatants into productive civilian roles, on the other.

Revitalizing civil society entails the promotion of local associations, community participation, and peer accountability, all of which reduce individual fear, enable collective condemnation of violence, and strengthen local security. These are the minimal conditions for encouraging people to reinvest in their communities both emotionally and financially.

The Sacred Trilogy

In the end, DRPs are important programs for not only freeing up resources, but also addressing the pressing needs of war-affected populations, and building the confidence of nationals to invest in their own lives and foreigners to invest in the countries.

For the past three decades civil wars have destroyed lives, skills, and assets, undermined institutional competence and accountability, caused incalculable personal dislocation and suffering, and intensified ethnic hostilities. In sum, internal strife has wrought havoc on civil society throughout the world.

There is now little doubt that development cannot be sustained without political stability and underlying security. Orderly demobilization, reinsertion, and reintegration of military personnel are central contributions to the restoration of civil society and the peaceful return to productive civilian life of hitherto destabilizing forces. Equally important are the establishment of a transparent legal system, a professional army and police force, and an independent judiciary and the implementation of economic reforms aimed at promoting growth and expanding employment opportunities.

The trilogy of security and good governance, the restoration of social capital, and macro-economic reform are the critical enabling conditions for the reconstruction process to be launched and progress to the stage of sustainable development.

From Demilitarization to War to Peace Transition

Operational experience and field research have enlarged our conceptualization of the technical aspects of DRPs. We can now identify at least three interwoven technical phases of any DRP: demobilization, including disarmament and discharge; reinsertion, including resettlement;

and reintegration. Our analysis has also brought into clearer focus the need for two more dimensions in the transition from war to peace, that is conflict prevention and reconciliation (see attached figure).

Conflict Prevention: Arms and Development

Overall, arms exports to Sub-Saharan Africa have declined markedly since the late 1980s, but sales of small weapons, especially antipersonnel mines, continue to be a lucrative business. The use of such weapons results in a most inhuman form of warfare that affects the civilian population more than it does the fighting army. For example, the estimated 100 million landmines spread across 60 countries kill 24,000 people each year, mostly in developing countries. About 20 million mines carpet several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. From 8 million to 10 million mines and unexploded ordnance are deployed in Angola alone.

It costs nearly $1,000 to deactivate a mine costing as little as $3 to purchase. Worse yet, the mere threat of these mines has hampered market forces—the movement of people, goods, and services—and resettlement of large tracts of arable land. Agricultural development has been retarded across Africa. The donor community may be able to accelerate the pace of demining by increasing funding and promoting new mine-clearing technology, but in the long run the manufacture and sale of small arms must be reduced if development is to be sustained. The negative connection between arms proliferation and protracted insecurity, on the one hand, and sustainable development, on the other, is self-evident.

The Conference on the Convention on Conventional Weapons, held in November 1995 in Vienna, addressed this issue. It was unable to reach consensus on a reform of the global governance regime for land mines. Discussions continue in capitals around the world. A laudable effort has also been launched by Nobel peace laureate Oscar S. Arias. In *Human Development Report 1994*, a publication of the United Nations Development Program, he proposed a Global Demilitarization Fund that would finance activities from demining to demobilization. Such efforts deserve the support of the development community. The recent success of the campaign to ban landmines is a hopeful sign that we are turning a major corner in the global efforts to move from war to peace.

Reconciliation: From War-torn to Civil Society

At the end of this seamless web of war-to-peace transition, reintegration in its full sense implies reentry into political and social as well as economic life. One of the legacies of protracted civil strife, however—in addition to the destruction of physical and human capital—has been the displacement of millions of people and the debasement of social capital. Of the estimated 70 million displaced persons in the world, about half are in Sub-Saharan Africa. More than a fifth of the people in nine African countries are displaced, as is a staggering two thirds of Liberia's population.

Social capital goes beyond the basic level of human association and trust that welds a civil society together; it also encompasses organizations, networks, and unwritten mores and rules. Field data for all three country case studies point to the importance of social support—be it family, religious groups, or ex-combatants themselves—in easing the reintegration process. Such social support provides not only psychosocial sustenance to returnees but also the pathways for becoming economically productive members of society (via informationandfinancial assistance, among other critical things).

Rebuilding social capital means a revitalization of civil society, and revitalizing civil society entails the promotion of local associations, community participation, trust and confidence building, and the establishment of peer accountability. It reduces the level of individual fear, enables the collective conditions that must be met if people are to reinvest in their communities, emotionally and financially. The state of social capital is also a barometer for external investors.

When it comes to reintegration, donors have a role beyond promoting employment and training for ex-combatants or rebuilding service structures. This role is the promotion of civil society. In many fragile sociopolitical environments, NGOs and secular and religious groups are at work organizing reconciliation activities, open community meetings, and other activities for free and transparent public exchanges between formerly hostile groups and individuals.

In Namibia church-led repatriation committees rebuilt trust between former adversaries in combat, now neighbors in development. In Somalia, in an attempt to rebuild civil society in the wake of the breakdown of bureaucratic authority, NGOs are working to reestablish the council of elders as a time-tested means of interclan governance. In South Africa a Truth Commission is trying to heal the wounds of years of violence under apartheid. In Mozambique the UNESCO-sponsored Culture of Peace Program seeks to use veterans as community peace promoters. In Cambodia the Thai Buddhist monastic order is providing technical assistance to revitalize *wats* and Buddhist temples, rekindling the moral authority and religiously rooted associational basis for civil society.

The most desirable outcome, for a country and its people, is the prevention of conflict. Where conflict has nonetheless occurred, the work of reconciliation has to be done. Reconciliation means bringing people to have faith again in civil institutions, in justice, and in the rule of law. In the final analysis, lasting reconciliation must be built on forgiveness.

Development Assistance at a Crossroads

Donors are increasingly seeking to establish early warning systems and rapid response mechanisms to forestall problems with DRPs, and to link relief and development efforts more closely if problems nonetheless arise. A major agenda item at the Halifax Summit of the Group of Seven industrial nations in June 1995 was to address ways of preventing and responding to crises. The Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations were called on to reinvigorate coordination to facilitate a smoother transition from emergency to reconstruction, from war to

peace.

Because most conflicts, particularly on the African continent, cannot be viewed as purely local problems, multilateral institutions are often cast in a prominent role. Refugees who stream across borders to avoid devastation often turn local hostilities into regional conflicts and neighboring countries host warning armies for cross-border warfare. Zaire, Uganda, and Rwanda, the Sudan, Eritrea, and Uganda, and Liberia and Sierra Leone are home to just a few of the many regionally interlinked wars. Regional wars will end only when regional answers are found.

Reform of national military and security establishments, whether post-conflict or in peacetime, is not within the purview of the multilateral institutions, nor do these institutions have a comparative advantage in this area. Moreover, the World Bank cannot by itself implement projects to rebuild social capital in war-torn societies. What the Bank can do is promote a secure and stable environment for development by supporting the removal and nonproliferation of mines and other antipersonnel weapons; encourage the realignment of national public expenditures from nonproductive to productive sectors; assist in the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants into a productive civilian life; finance the reconstruction of physical assets; and helping rebuild social capital. These are vital areas for Bank intellectual leadership, resource mobilization, and donor coordination.

Given the current political environment in Sub-Saharan Africa, the demand for such leadership will not diminish in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, more and more countries are appearing on the radar screen, from Sierra Leone and DR Congo to Sudan and Somalia. By honoring their requests for guidance, the Bank can lend credence to the role of a DRP as a central element in the reconstruction and development of war-torn societies and can play an important leadership role in the larger transition from war to peace.